

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY MANILA

S E C R E T STATE 065929

FOLLOWING REPEAT SINGAPORE 1385 ACTION SECSTATE, INFO LONDON,
CANBERRA, WELLINGTON, AND CINCPAC HONOLULU HI 27 MARCH 1974.
QUOTE:

S E C R E T SINGAPORE 1385

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, SN

SUBJECT: FACILITIES IN SINGAPORE FOR SOVIET SHIPPING

REF: A. STATE 057157 (NOTAL); B. SINGAPORE 1267

(NOTAL); C. IR NO. 6 887 0031 73 (NOTAL);

D. IR NO. 6 887 0153 73 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. TWO SOVIET COMBATANT SHIPS CITED PARA
2 REF B WERE REPAIR SHIP AND SUBMARINE RESCUE VESSEL.
ALTHOUGH THEY MOUNTED GUNS AND FLEW WHITE ENSIGN,
THEY WERE ESSENTIALLY NAVAL SUPPORT SHIPS. EMBASSY
ADVISED BY UK HICOM ON MARCH 25 THAT ANZUK REPS IN
SINGAPORE BELIEVE RECENT USE PSA PIER IN ANZUK STORES
BASIN BY FOUR SOVIET AND BLOC MERCHANT SHIPS REPRESENTED
EXCEPTIONAL CASES, AND THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO
SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN GOS POLICY IN RESTRICTING SOVIET
AND OTHER COMMUNIST MERCHANT SHIP ACCESS TO COMMERCIAL
FACILITIES IN STRAITS OF JOHORE.

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2. HOWEVER, EMBASSY SUBSEQUENTLY INFORMED OF GOS DECISION TO ALLOW ONE EAST GERMAN AND ONE SOVIET FREIGHTER TO DOCK AT SAME PIER IN STORES BASIN DURING PAST WEEK. THIS DEVELOPMENT RAISES SERIOUS QUESTIONS RE ACCURACY OF ABOVE ANZUK ASSESSMENT. THESE LATEST "EXCEPTIONS," AT LEAST ONE OF WHICH WAS WITHOUT ADVANCE NOTICE, HAVE FRAYED UK PATIENCE AND QUESTION WILL BE DISCUSSED AT ANZUK MEETING ON MARCH 28. ALTHOUGH SITUATION REMAINS TO BE CLARIFIED, GOS IS APPARENTLY PREPARED FOR COMMERCIAL REASONS TO ALLOW INCREASED NUMBER OF SOVIET MERCHANT SHIPS TO ENTER STRAITS OF JOHORE AND USE PSA BERTHS IN THE STORES BASIN. NAVATT STATED THAT ALL SOVIET MERCHANT SHIPS WHICH HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO USE PSA BERTHS AT STORES BASIN APPEAR TO HAVE HAD LEGITIMATE COMMERCIAL REASONS FOR DOING SO. BELIEVE WE SHOULD AWAIT ANZUK REVIEW AND DECISION RE POSSIBLE ACTION BEFORE DECIDING WEHETHER US SHOULD EITHER JOIN OR MAKE SUPPLEMENTARY REPRESENTATIONS TO GOS ON THIS MATTER. END SUMMARY.

3. FOLLOWING INFO IS IN RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR PARTICULARS PARA 1 REF A: SS-83 PRUT CLASS SUB-MARINE RESCUE VESSEL VISITED SINGAPORE 26 FEB - 1 MARCH 1973 BUT REMAINED AT ANCHORAGE. PM ";0 DNEPR CLASS REPAIR SHIP ENTERED KEPPEL SHIPYARD FOR REPAIRS 21 NOV - 1 DEC 1973. BOTH SHIPS ARE LISTED/PICTURED IN CURRENT EDITION DIA PUBLICATION ST-HB 08-41 A-73. SIMILAR VESSELS DEPICTED PAGE 64 JANES' 71/72 EDITION.

4. BELIEVE SOME CONFUSION EXISTS WITH TERM "COMBATANTS." DAO SINGAPORE APPLIES THIS TERM TO ALL WHITE ENSIGN SHIPS AND WHITE ENSIGN ONLY. TWO SHIPS CITED PARA 3 BOTH CARRIED GUNS AND NAVAL UNIFORMED CREWS. ALTHOUGH OTHER SOVIET VESSELS HAVE VISITED SINGAPORE WITH NAVAL UNIFORMED CREWS, THEY HAVE FLOWN NAVAL AUXILIARY ENSIGN AND HAVE NOT BEEN CLASSIFIED AS COMBATANTS. VISITS OF BOTH SHIPS FULLY REPORTED IN REFS C AND D. IN COMMENTING ON ABOVE VISITS TO DCM, DEPUTY UK HICOM WATTS POINTED OUT GOS HAD NEVER UNDERTAKEN NOT TO ALLOW SOVIET WARSHIPS TO VISIT SINGAPORE. HOWEVER,
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UK HAD MADE IT CLEAR TO GOS IN PAST THAT UK DID NOT APPROVE OF SOVIET WARSHIP VISITS TO SINGAPORE AND WOULD HAVE TO RECONSIDER ITS PARTICIPATION IN FPDA IF GOS ALLOWED SUCH VISITS. IN ABOVE CASES, HICOM CONSIDERED SHIPS TO BE ESSENTIALLY NAVAL SUPPORT SHIPS AND DID NOT PROTEST. WATTS SAID HE WAS NOT PARTICULARLY WORRIED ABOUT THIS PROBLEM SINCE SOVIETS PROBABLY DID NOT WISH TO EXPOSE THEIR COMBATANT SHIPS TO FOREIGN

INTELLIGENCE ACCESS.

5. WATTS CONFIRMED TO DCM ON MARCH 25 THAT 4 SOVIET/BLOC MERCHANT SHIPS HAD USED PSA PIER AT ANZUK STORES BASIN IN PAST 5 WEEKS. (TWO BERTHS WITHIN CONFINES OF BASIN ARE NOT UNDER ANZUK CONTROL BUT ARE USED AND SCHEDULED BY PSA.) WATTS SAID THAT CAREFUL REVIEW OF CIRCUMSTANCES WITH GOS DID NOT INDICATE ANY CHANGE IN SINGAPORE'S POLICY. HE POINTED OUT THAT WHILE GOS POLICY DID NOT ALLOW ANY SOVIET OR COMMUNIST COUNTRY WARSHIPS TO SAIL NORTH OF CHANGI POINT INTO THE STRAITS OF JOHORE AND PROHIBITED ANY USE OF SEMBAWANG SHIPYARD BY SOVIET AND COMMUNIST MERCHANT SHIPS, IT DID NOT ABSOLUTELY PRECLUDE ALL MOVEMENT OF SOVIET MERCHANT SHIPPING IN STRAITS OF JOHORE OR IN SEMBAWANG AREA. WHEN PSA HAD TAKEN OVER CONTROL OF SHIP TRAFFIC IN THIS AREA FROM BRITISH FLEET COMMANDER IN 1972, GOS HAD GIVEN VERBAL COMMITMENT TO ANZUK POWERS THAT IT WOULD ALWAYS PROVIDE ADVANCE NOTICE WITH OPPORTUNITY FOR ANZUK REPS TO EXPRESS OBJECTIONS BEFORE ALLOWING SOVIET MERCHANT SHIPS TO PROCEED INTO THE STRAITS OF JOHORE, AND WOULD ENDEAVOR TO LIMIT THESE EXCEPTIONS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

6. REVIEWING THE PARTICULARS OF THE 4 SOVIET/BLOC SHIPS WATTS SAID ADVANCE NOTICE HAD BEEN GIVEN FOR 2 OUT OF THE 4. THESE 2 SHIPS WERE SOVIET FREIGHTERS WHICH HAD LOADED TIMBER AT THE PSA DOCK IN THE ANZUK STORES BASIN. GOS HAD EXPLAINED TO ANZUK REPS THAT CON-
FERENCE RATES FOR SHIPPING TIMBER HAD GREATLY INCREASED AND THAT TIMBER MERCHANTS FOUND THAT ONLY SOVIET TRAMP FREIGHTERS OFFERED RATES WHICH MADE SHIPMENT ECONOMICALLY FEASIBLE. ANZUK REPS CONSIDERED MATTER
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AND DECIDED NOT TO MAKE ANY OBJECTIONS. OTHER TWO CASES INVOLVED AN EASTGERMAN AND A POLISH SHIP. WHEN UK HICOM INFORMALLY EXPRESSED CONCERN TO DIRECTOR OF SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE (MINDEF) S. R. NATHAN OVER FAILURE TO PROVIDE NOTICE, NATHAN EXPRESSED REGRETS BUT SAID THIS WAS RESULT OF ADMINISTRATIVE ERRORS AND CAUSED BY CONFUSION GENERATED BY REORGANIZATION IN PSA. HE INDICATED THAT APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINARY ACTION WAS BEING TAKEN AGAINST OFFICIALS INVOLVED. NATHAN REPORTEDLY SAID GOS BASIC POLICY ON ACCESS OF SOVIET AND OTHER COMMUNIST COUNTRY SHIPPING HAD NOT CHANGED. ANZUK REPS HAVE ACCEPTED NATHAN'S EXPLANATION AND DO NOT BELIEVE THERE HAS BEEN ANY EROSION IN GOS POLICY. HOWEVER, THERE IS SOME CONCERN THAT ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES MAY CAUSE GOS TO GRANT MORE EXCEPTIONS. WATTS COMMENTED THAT IF THERE WERE ANY

MORE ADMINISTRATIVE MISTAKES, UK HICOM WOULD PROBABLY EXPRESS OFFICIAL CONCERN TO GOS.

7. SHORTLY AFTER WATTS PROVIDED EXPLANATION OF FOUR EXCEPTIONS DISCUSSED IN PARAS 5 AND 6 ABOVE, NAVATT ADVISED BY ANZUK SOURCES THAT PSA HAD ALLOWED ONE SOVIET AND ONE EAST GERMAN FREIGHTER TO DOCK AT PSA BERTHS AT ANZUK STORES BASIN DURING PAST WEEK. ACCORDING TO THESE SOURCES, GOS HAD NOT PROVIDED REQUIRED ADVANCE NOTIFICATION FOR EITHER VESSEL. WATTS SUBSEQUENTLY ADVISED DCM THAT WHEN HICOM QUERIED GOS ON THESE LATEST "EXCEPTIONS," GOS MAINTAINED THAT ADVANCE VERBAL NOTIFICATION HAD BEEN GIVEN IN CASE OF SOVIET SHIP AND AGAIN REGRETTED THAT "ADMINISTRATIVE CONFUSION" HAD ACCOUNTED FOR FAILURE TO GIVE ADVANCE NOTIFICATION FOR EAST GERMAN SHIP. WATTS SAID THESE LATEST CASES HAD "FRAYED" HICOM PATIENCE, BUT THAT UK WOULD REVIEW MATTER WITH ANZUK REPS MEETING MARCH 28 BEFORE DECIDING ON FURTHER REPRESENTATIONS TO GOS.

8. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH WATTS AS WELL AS AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND HICOM SENIOR OFFICIALS WERE QUITE CONFIDENT THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO CHANGE IN GOS POLICY, THESE TWO LATEST EXCEPTIONS OVER THE WEEK-END HAVE OBVIOUSLY RAISED SERIOUS QUESTIONS AS TO WHETHER THERE IS SOME EROSION IN GOS POLICY. ALTHOUGH GOS FAILURE TO PRO-

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VIDE ADVANCE NOTICE IN SEVERAL OF THESE CASES MAY IN FACT BE DUE TO ADMINISTRATIVE CONFUSION, IT WOULD APPEAR FROM AVAILABLE EVIDENCE THAT THE GOS IS PREPARED TO ALLOW INCREASED NUMBER OF SOVIET MERCHANT SHIPS TO ENTER STRAITS OF JOHORE TO USE PSA BERTHS AT ANZUK STORES BASIN. DEPT SHOULD NOTE THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO EROSION IN GOS POLICY OF REFUSING TO ALLOW SOVIET USE OF SEMBAWANG SHIPYARD (SSY). WATTS SAID THAT PERMSEC MINDEF AND CHAIRMAN OF BOARD OF SSY, PANG TEE POW, HAD TOLD HIM RECENTLY THAT EVEN THOUGH SSY STANDS TO LOSE CONSIDERABLE MONEY BY KEEPING SOVIETS OUT, HE WILL NOT PERMIT SOVIET SHIPPING TO ENTER SSY UNLESS HE RECEIVES DIRECT ORDERS TO DO SO FROM MINISTER GOH.

9. GIVEN CONTINUED PRESSURE BY SOVIET SHIPPING AGENTS FOR GREATER ACCESS BY SOVIET MERCHANT SHIPS TO ALL COMMERCIAL FACILITIES IN SINGAPORE, IT IS QUESTIONABLE WHETHER ANZUK POWERS WILL BE ABLE TO REVERSE TREND TOWARD INCREASED USE OF PSA BERTHS IN ANZUK STORES BASIN BY SOVIET MERCHANT SHIPS. (THEY MAY HOWEVER SUCCEED IN OBTAINING MORE REGULAR ADVANCE NOTICE.) GIVEN IMPENDING DISSOLUTION OF ANZUK COMMAND AND EXISTENCE

OF UNDERUTILIZED SHIPYARD AND DOCK CAPACITY, ANZUK
POWERS WOULD APPEAR TO HAVE DECREASING LEVERAGE WITH
GOS ON THIS ISSUE. BELIEVE US SHOULD AWAIT ANZUK
REVIEW AND POSSIBLE DECISIONS ARISING FROM THIS
REVIEW BEFORE DECIDING WHETHER US SHOULD EITHER JOIN
OR MAKE SUPPLEMENTARY REPRESENTATIONS TO GOS
ON THIS MATTER.
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